Interview Summary: Catherine Diodati

Ms. Diodati was interviewed by John Mather and Allison McMahon on October 5, 2022. Questions about this witness summary should be directed to Ms. McMahon.

Text contained in [square brackets] are explanatory notes provided by Commission Counsel to assist the reader.

Background

Ms. Diodati resides in Windsor, Ontario. Between September 2020-May 2022, she assisted with weekly rallies held at Dieppe Park in Windsor concerning COVID-19 and related public health measures. She also attended the protests that occurred near the Ambassador Bridge port of entry ("**POE**") in late January and early February 2022.

Professional History

Ms. Diodati obtained a Master of Arts in Religious Studies at the University of Windsor in 1998. She stated that her thesis, which she subsequently published as a book, focused on the ethics of mass immunization. Ms. Diodati said that she spent a total of 25 years as an independent vaccine researcher, public speaker, writer, and advocate for vaccine-injured individuals, as well as an advocate for students and military personnel seeking exemptions from vaccine requirements. She also practiced hand-on healing (including massage, acupressure, etc.). Ms. Diodati has been retired since 2016.

Concerns about COVID-19

Ms. Diodati explained that through her work, she encountered Gulf War veterans who had been forced to volunteer for medical experiments. She saw similarities between those experiments and what was happening with COVID-19 vaccines.

Ms. Diodati stated that COVID-19 did not resemble what she expected a normal pandemic would look like, i.e., family, friends, and neighbours dying all around her. As well, she said that masking did not make sense, because masks are designed to stop spittle going into a surgical field and are not effective against viruses or bacteria. Ms. Diodati explained that, based on her review of the ingredients in the COVID-19 vaccine, she believed it was a dangerous substance and not a vaccine. She stated that the vaccine does not prevent infection or transmission of the virus and has caused infertility, abortion, neurological symptoms, and death.

Involvement in Anti-Mandate Protests

Weekly Rallies

Ms. Diodati stated that she connected with other individuals concerned about the public health response to COVID-19 in the comment section of Windsorite.ca. Through those contacts, she learned of a rally near City Hall on September 12, 2020. There were a few speakers and a small group of attendees at the event.

Thereafter, she assisted with tasks required for the rallies as needed (e.g., by speaking to the audience or providing supplies for beverages). She said that the rallies were intended to be educational, with different speakers addressing different issues related to COVID-19 (e.g., masks and vaccines). Typically, there was a march as well. The events continued until May 2022, and the number of participants grew over time.

Ms. Diodati explained that the rallies were organized by a core group of volunteers (including, at times, herself), who would typically coordinate over Facebook or in person. The membership of the core group varied over time. The group did not have a specific leader, though some people assumed more responsibilities than others.

She said there was no conflict or disagreement within the core group. On one occasion, the group decided not to work with another activist due to philosophical differences. As well, Ms. Diodati said that some local organizations did not want to partner with them because of media reports that gave the misleading impression that the group was violent. Ms. Diodati stated that the rallies were peaceful and noted that the police were present each week.

Ms. Diodati explained that she used Facebook to connect with others interested in COVID-related issues. A group called "Questioning COVID in Windsor-Essex" became a hub for sharing information about upcoming rallies. Ms. Diodati subsequently joined groups dedicated to the Freedom Convoy, including one called "Freedom Convoy 2022". The aim of this group was to share information about the convoy and to coordinate the timing of convoys departing across the country.

Slow Roll Protest

Ms. Diodati said that on January 26, 2022, she went to a "slow roll" protest at the corner of Huron Church Road and Tecumseh St. [The intersection of Huron Church Road and Tecumseh St. is approximately two kilometers from the Ambassador Bridge.] There were a few hundred people holding signs, mainly in support of the truckers.

Ms. Diodati said that traffic was not impeded by the demonstration. The lanes the truckers were using were continually moving, and one lane remained open. The atmosphere was

joyful. Ms. Diodati expressed that she was happy that truckers were joining the movement. She attended the protest to hold a sign thanking the truckers for their support.

Ms. Diodati explained that she learned about the slow roll protest on a Freedom Convoy Facebook group. Information about the protest was also posted on the Questioning COVID in Windsor-Essex Facebook page. Ms. Diodati understands that the slow roll protest was initiated at an early morning meet-up at one of the service centres outside of town. However, she does not know exactly when this occurred or who was responsible for organizing them.

Ambassador Bridge Protest

On Friday, February 11, 2022, Ms. Diodati attended a protest at Huron Church Road and Tecumseh. Ms. Diodati recalled that there were some vehicles parked on Huron Church Road south of Tecumseh, but traffic was flowing around them. She said that Huron Church Road was barricaded by police vehicles north of Tecumseh.

At 7:00 p.m., the injunction came into effect. [The injunction prohibited impeding or blocking access to the Ambassador Bridge, including indirect or direct approaching roadways]. Ms. Diodati said that by 7:30 p.m., a young female police officer was handing out sheets of paper, which explained the terms of the injunction and the potential consequences for failing to comply with it (including fines and confiscation of property). Ms. Diodati said she asked the officer, "what does this mean in terms of legality of protests? Will someone arrest us?" She observed that the officer was shaking, which surprised her. She said that she thought that the officer must have heard that the protesters were violent, so she told the officer, "You're safe, it's okay, none of us have ever been violent."

On Saturday, February 12, Ms. Diodati went to Huron Church Road near College Road [College Road is the intersection closest to the Ambassador Bridge POE.] Ms. Diodati said that the area was barricaded by police and the intersection looked like a war zone, which did not fit with the joyful atmosphere. Ms. Diodati recalled that she also spoke to a police officer from the East Coast. She said, "Look at these heavy armoured vehicles and firearms, what are you planning to do with us?" He told her, "We have no orders." They then had a pleasant, friendly conversation that lasted about 20 minutes. Ms. Diodati stated that the officers appeared relaxed and laughed with the protesters.

Ms. Diodati explained that she did not personally witness any effort by police to disperse the protest. However, she saw videos the following day in which the police pushed the crowd back by walking side by side in a line. She also saw videos of people being injured and read posts where people described what happened to them. For example, she described a post by a young woman who said that her father asked police where he could stand. He was told that he was allowed to be on the sidewalk. Shortly thereafter, he was

pushed to the ground by police, knocked unconscious, and dragged into a police vehicle. CTV showed this incident and described the man as having resisted arrest, which was inaccurate.

Ms. Diodati stated that she attended the protests alone. However, she saw some people she recognized from the rallies. She said that she does not know who organized the protests. She also confirmed that she did not witness any protesters engaging in or encouraging violence.

Protests in Ottawa

Ms. Diodati stated that she did not attend the protests in Ottawa. However, she knew a few people who did. Their posts on social media made it seem like a big party. She said that she saw some videos in which people were hurt by police officers, which was distressing.

Fundraising

Ms. Diodati said that she was not aware of any formal fundraising efforts for the protesters in Windsor, though she noted that individual protesters may have given truckers small amounts of money to cover gas and other expenses. She was also aware of the GiveSendGo fundraiser for the Freedom Convoy movement more generally.

The *Emergencies Act*

Ms. Diodati noted that police enforcement of the injunction ended the protests around the Ambassador Bridge. As a result, the *Emergencies Act* did not have any effect in Windsor.

Following the invocation of the *Emergencies Act*, she felt that the sense of mistrust toward the government grew. As well, people not involved in protest began blaming the protesters for causing "all of this."

Communication with Government Officials

Ms. Diodati emphasized that politicians should listen to citizens and address their concerns. She explained that she spoke to City Council against a proposal to implement an indefinite mask mandate in September 2020. However, her group was treated with disrespect. For example, there were crackling and squealing noises and the interruptions to the video feed while they spoke. During her remarks, Ms. Diodati said, "Stop this nonsense, fix it, and start my time again." As a result, there were no further issues while she was speaking. However, the same issues started again when the next speaker took the floor.

Ms. Diodati said that, in her experience, politicians will not talk to people to resolve their concerns. She noted that protesters sent letters and emails and made phone calls to politicians ranging from Prime Minister Trudeau to Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens. However, to her knowledge, no municipal or provincial politician attempted to engage the protesters in Windsor in January-February 2022, nor at any time since the protest rallies began in 2020.

Ms. Diodati also stated that politicians were dishonest in their communications with her. For example, MPP Percy Hatfield's office told her that he could not attend the Legislative Assembly to vote due to COVID restrictions. However, MPP Randy Hillier later told her that this was not true.

She recalled that in an interview with ABC News, the Mayor said, "I don't know who to talk to". However, he never attended the protests or reached out to protesters in another means (e.g., via social media). If he had contacted anyone in her group, she was sure they would have tried to find the right organizers for him to speak to.

Ms. Diodati observed the same issue in respect of the protests in Ottawa: Protesters wanted to speak to the Prime Minister, but he refused to do so.

Ms. Diodati also noted that the politicians do not observe the rules that apply to everyone else. For example, when indoor dining was limited to six people per table, the Mayor was seen dining with a group of eight.